



Less Than Love



romance

pianist

piano-lessons

131 18 16

Chapter 1 by -

I gazed up at the cathedral, the steeple cutting through the stormy clouds. My hands hesitantly reached for the antique handle as thunder roared around me. I quickly pushed open the door and then slammed it shut as I leaned my back on its wooden surface.

From the sanctuary I could hear music emanating. The slow, melancholy tune made me forget my apprehension as I stepped quietly down the aisle. The doleful melody rose to the peak of the pointed ceiling and filled the room with a heart stirring ache.

"You're late." The pianist's voice shattered the musical synesthesia. The man rose from the bench, staring at me with piercing eyes. He was dressed in a starched black suit and polished shoes.

I looked at the man as if in a trance, my hands trembling as I spoke. There was a strange ring in his tone. Something in his sparkling eyes that made me unable to disengage. "I..." Words escaped me as he moved away from the piano and motioned for me to sit down.

The man stood erect, his hands behind his back, as he closed his eyes and leaned against the closest window frame. "Begin"

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Chapter 2 by -

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I took a deep breath and brought my arms in a gentle wave down upon the ivory keys. A minor note cracking through the atmosphere and sending a shiver up my spine.

As the melody waltzed around the cathedral, I forgot about the man watching me. I didn't notice as his eyes blinked open and he moved towards the piano.

He gazed at me from behind, assessing my musical talent. Examining the the smooth movements of my arms and the dexterity of my fingers. "How long Madame?" His voice was now soft and appealing. His black eyes looked eagerly into mine, as if imploring me to respond.

I shook my head in bewilderment, my lips parting slightly. "How lo--?" The man leaned forward and put his arms around me. Embracing me awkwardly and pressing his lips into mine...

Chapter 3 by -



His hand crept down to my waist, slowly tightening. I jabbed my elbow into his chest, unbalancing him enough to slip out of his passionate grasp.

As I rushed down the aisle, I could here him curse under his breath as he hit the piano bench with his clenched fists. I gave one glance over my shoulder before slamming the door shut behind me, and I saw him kneeling on the ground looking upward, with his left arm over his heart.

My feet lightly touched the street as I ran homeward. My breaths were coming in gasps and I was trembling all over. I could still feel the warmth from his hands about my figure.

The closer I reached to home, the more my chest heaved. The more I ran, the more salty tears trailed down my face.

I quickly slipped through the back entrance and into my room. There, I locked the door and unleashed my flood of frustration. I could find no comfort, as I lay curled up on my bed.

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I stood there for some moments, the events of the previous evening surging through my mind. It seemed so distant, like a dream. I wondered whether such a thing could have happened to me...

But it had. When I closed my eyelids, and thought back, I could still feel the pulse of his veins around my waist. The lingering touch of his lips upon mine. Subconsciously, my fingers reached up and to my lips, as if to see if --

No! I dropped my arm and cast my head downward. Ashamed of my thoughts.

And yet, as tears of guilt soaked my face, I could not help but think of *him*.

Chapter 5 by Stan Johnson



Five, long days have passed since the... incident. That means today is piano lesson day. As the clock ticks over to 5:30, Mom knocks at the door just as she always does. "Honey? Let's go. I'll be in the car." I close my eyes, shuddering; I never told Mom what happened. And yet, despite myself, I can't think of anything else. His face lingers in my mind's eye, and I can still feel his touch even though I force myself to think it's something else.

I grab my bag, but pause in front of the full length mirror, letting my eyes wander across the image of the girl I see there. She looks exactly like me again—her red, swollen eyes replaced with the normal cheery green ones everyone else sees. Except there's no cheer there anymore. Only fear. And—as much as I try to ignore it—fiery anticipation.

I watch as the girl in the mirror brings her hands up, turning those long, skinny fingers over and over, then running them along her face. I feel the fingertips against me, and when I brush across my own lips, a cold fire races through them.

How could he do that to me?

Then something crosses my mind. A trembling, unwelcome thought that I almost can't help but entertain. No one else has ever tried to kiss me. No one else has ever tried to love me that way.

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But he's an old man. Trembling. A predator! A predator!

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But even as I think that, my eyes travel the length of the reflected girl again. Is she *actually* pretty after all?

I run my hands down my sides, touching the same places he touched. I shiver deep inside at the memory, but... am I missing something? Does he see something in me that I don't see? That none of the guys at school see? Maybe... maybe my teacher might be right. Maybe I need to let him help me see what he sees.

Thinking about it sets my heart racing. All at once, I both dread seeing him and *long* to see him again. To feel the touch of someone who may actually *love* me, even if he's more than twice my age. If nothing else, he'd be more *mature* than the guys at school. That's good, right?

And so, I decide to give him a chance. I hastily fix my hair and check my makeup. Almost as an afterthought, I spritz on perfume. If I'm going to do this, I may as well do it right.

Chapter 6 by Vampiro Neko-kami



Sitting in the passenger seat of my mom's car, I cross my fingers in anticipation, hoping, wishing, praying that he would forgive my act of violence the last time I had seen him.

The last time I saw him...

Impulsively, my fingers reach up to touch my lips, remembering the burning passion in which his lips met mine.

"Honey? Is there something wrong?" A voice broke through my daydreams.

"No." I mutter, embarrassed at having been caught thinking of such degrading things.

"Is that so? Well, for once you actually try to make yourself presentable for piano." My flush deepened, having had my ruse revealed. "You look really beautiful, I'm sure your teacher would be pleased."

"I hope so." I whisper to myself, unintentionally attempting to visualize his face upon seeing me.

"Did you say something?" My mom asks as I pull out of the road.

"Nothing." I sing, my voice soft and melodic. He is standing next to the piano bench, elegant in his crisp black suit, his face shocked by my appearance, but slowly

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melting into a smile.

I shake my head, trying to disperse the thoughts of that person. It wasn't like I liked him, I just simply accepted him.

"Honey, we're here." I leaped out of the car, nearly losing my balance, in the effort to get inside. Even in the light, the cathedral still emitted the same creepy air as the first time I came. The first time I saw him.

I flung open the doors, with confidence this time, but upon entering, I soon realized that nothing I could've imagined prepared me with what I was seeing.

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